



EXHIBIT /
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SB HB 734

MONTANA ADVOCACY PROGRAM, INC.

The Civil Rights Protection & Advocacy System for the State of Montana

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February 19, 2007

The Hon. Rep. Ron Stoker, Chair
House Human Services Committee

HB 734: An Act providing for additional mental health services

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

The Montana Advocacy Program thanks Rep. McAlpin for bringing this bill, which recognizes these urgent and unmet needs in our communities:

- Low-income people living with serious mental illnesses need a realistic mental health services benefit so that they can get timely services in the community.
- We need to start rebuilding community services during this biennium.
- A healthy, functioning community mental health system is the best medicine for our overcrowded criminal justice and corrections systems.
- We need to begin re-designing our community mental health system so that it reflects the principles enunciated by the President's New Freedom Commission on transforming mental health care in America.
- The transformation of Montana's system needs to be led from the ground up, by local advisory councils and the service area authorities.

MAP recommends two amendments. The first, regarding use of telemedicine networks for civil commitment proceedings, is inappropriate because the Department is not a party to civil commitment proceedings, and also because conducting civil commitment hearings through video-conferencing is already addressed § 53-21-140, MCA.

The second amendment deletes the requirement that the mental health services plan benefit must be the same as the Medicaid benefit. MAP believes that a mental health services benefit that employs the evidence-based, recovery-oriented and client-driven services needs to be designed by the Department, in collaboration with SAA's, and that the resulting benefit may look different from Medicaid.

Thank you for considering these remarks.

Sincerely,

Anita Roessmann

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